

**EL STATUS DE LAS COMUNIDADES AFROLATINAS EN LAS AMERICAS  
AGOSTO DE 2005, BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA**

**Transmission Oral: Matilde Luisa Esquire**

Matilde moved often. Though she lived for some time in the Puerto and enjoyed being there, she left upon realizing she needed more resources to support her growing family. She bought land in Santa Fe. Her children now span the ages of 42 to 26. As the population in Santa Fe has grown, she notices new faces often, as many as 3 or 4 a week that she's not seen in previous weeks. But people's attitudes don't change, she says. They remain prejudiced and narrow-minded. She is known in her neighborhood as "La Negra Incomplida (or Increida)" because she keeps to herself in the face of a barrio that sees her as a permanent outsider. She asks herself why anyone would stay in an area amongst people who don't want you or don't treat you well and remain unfriendly. "Viven muy adentro y tenemos abrirnos mas," she says, adding that the nation's military process produced a society of individualists as it focused on social conveniences rather than communal cooperation.

**Summary of Experience**

While the conference provided invaluable informative instances, allow me to voice these first few details, which simply signify my own continued curiosity and concern in the subject:

At the earliest points in the week there was a lack of communication between the participating youth groups— our own delegate committee and the youth from Sante Fe. This became problematic later in the week when the planning and scheduling of the youth contingent's presentation was executed without a sense of familiarity between the foreign delegates and the local ones.

The opening night dedication to Señor Nadal as necessary and gracious as it was underplayed: no real proximity was provided in terms of his story and work. For these reasons, Nadal's work, and subsequently the dedication to him, were not presented on as significant level one would hope. This of course is the perspective of an outsider to the local community history, many of whom must already be well acquainted with Señor Nadal and his work.

Also largely unaddressed was the quotidian life of Afrodescendiente youth of Buenos Aires proper—i.e. how do contemporary, young Afro-Argentinos exist in the make up of that cosmopolitan atmosphere on a day to day basis? The focus seemed to fall heavily on more recent immigrant communities (the Cabo Verdian and Ecuadorian components for example) rather than on the Argentinos of African descent, and even then, discussions seemed to deal with organizations rather than with communities per say.

Obviously, the conference in Buenos Aires was interesting numerous levels. According to what happened inside and outside of the conference rooms, a few major points come to mind.

The social invisibility of Afro-Argentinos seems to be definitive of how an institutionalized lack of political representation produces multi-tiered challenges that are increasingly difficult to dismantle.

In this respect, one of the most positive components of the conference was the fact that it introduced various delegates to one another for the first time. For those who were already familiar with one another, the conference offered possibilities to strengthen existing ties. In this way the growth and affirmation of organizational networks was supported in practical and useful ways. Through this network, especially from the viewpoint of a relative newcomer like myself, the flow of international information and pragmatic support has increased.

So the conference was successful in bringing together a variety of activists and cultural workers from the international community. Meeting organizers and professionals from across the Americas, and learning of their ongoing work in the field will prove invaluable. I was impressed not only by the differing perspectives of participants but also by the range of ages represented. I consider of ultimate importance the glimpse the conference provided as to how our work has developed over generations in such a way that ensures progress can continue to be made on a steady basis into the future. The importance of intergenerational participation is invaluable as mentorship of younger activists by older ones provides linkages that are not easily broken. Such an intergenerational tradition of resistance is among the strongest of weapons.

Also noteworthy is that besides the presence of international community activists and political organizations, there was participation on behalf of the institutional sector. Although mostly representing lending institutions, the few conference delegates who were present suggested changes in the relationships between Afro-descendant interest groups and segments of somewhat monstrous bureaucratic agencies that have traditionally been viewed as untrustworthy. Some delegates inferred that reliance upon such institutions remains a mistake, adding that we should concern ourselves with securing more community based, cooperative financial networks. While I find this to be true, representatives of those institutions made a case that deserves further consideration.

Citing themselves as examples, they claim the faces within such multilateral institutions are changing. They argue that, at least in theory, the way those institutions conduct their business is also changeable. For me, one main point of the discussion is that *individual* politics and conversations change *general* policies and practices to some degree. While many activists may have difficulty in evolving political viewpoints which reassess the accessibility and acceptability of multilateral banks, lending institutions, and governmental departments, it can be argued that these institutions should be considered as significant, useful fronts and possible points of alliance within the changing context of international community activism. This part of the conference has proven to be a lasting of conversations thus far. The number of viewpoints on this topic is extensive and the perspectives are diverse. I'm trying, at the moment, to continue the dialogue about the nature of institutional involvement, cognizant of lines of thinking wherein resistance equals non-participation in certain sectors. The most solid of these viewpoints discard personal criticisms in favor of strategic analysis and offer a number of possibilities in terms of how to shape relations with traditionally rejected institutions and forms of government.

It should be mentioned that as conversations in this area come to temporary stops, the amount of respect that community members afford each other's views is commendable. Though our views are various, brothers and sisters are often willing to listen to each other and keep a common struggle in mind. In this way, the sense of camaraderie remains strengthened among participants.

Another significant feature of the conference process was its offering of continued confirmation that issues plaguing Afrodescendiente communities are truly without border. The trip to Santa Fe, for example, was demonstrative of the fact that unemployment, police brutality, and general forms of institutional discrimination that in turn influence increased intra-community abuses such as alcohol and drug abuse—are universal problems facing Afrodescendiente communities. With this in mind, systematic attempts to negate Afrodescendiente populations has fortified institutional practices of racism to such a degree that contemporary combat against them is challenged at every stage. While this is nothing new, it comments directly upon the way that Santa Fe serves as another motivating signpost in the process of connecting dots between Afrodescendiente communities while reinforcing the common objectives of increased support across the board to programs dealing with Health, Education, Identity, Social, Political and Economic Representation, as well as institution strengthening on a grassroots level.

Another useful and important concept that also comes to mind when reflecting over our visit to Santa Fe, and Argentina in general, is that while the numeric significance of Afrodescendiente populations in such Latin American countries as Argentina, Chile, and Mexico, may not seem so high, the ideological significance of these same populations is of the utmost importance. In this vein, I think some one made mention of the term “Afrogenesis,” which besides any initial coming into consciousness of Afrodescendientes, further signifies the constant reassessment and recontextualization of the movement toward connecting local and international Afrodescendiente communities for the betterment of all.